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EU Humanitarian aid: Lessons identified and the way forward

Introduction

The new uncertain geopolitical context has had a far-reaching impact, including on European Union (EU) humanitarian aid. The EU has faced a rising number of terrorist attacks across Europe that has created an atmosphere of fear, while the United Kingdom (UK)'s decision to withdraw from the EU has challenged the European project as we know it. The EU institutions and its Member States, as well as international institutions have been challenged in their response to refugees seeking asylum, and to the humanitarian crises in the Mediterranean. Equally, the election of President Trump has ushered in a new era of United States (US) unilateralism, creating a gap on the global agenda.

On a more positive note, the EU and its Member States remain the world's leading humanitarian aid donor, with a stable increase in total aid in the last five years. According to the OECD, the EU and its Member States are responsible for more than 50 % of the world's official development assistance (ODA).¹ They provide a major proportion of global funding for emergency relief to victims of man-made and natural disasters in third countries. Part of these funds comes directly from Member States, but a large share originates from the EU budget. The EU has a financial envelope of €6 621.70 million for humanitarian aid under the current 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF) (the equivalent of 0.61 % of the MFF).²

Despite the scale of resources the EU devotes to humanitarian aid, worldwide demand for humanitarian aid continues to outstrip donations. Moreover, EU aid needs to be put in context. EU Member States' aid contributions still fall considerably below their collective ODA commitment to deliver 0.7 % of EU gross national income (GNI). In addition, more than half of the increases in aid from EU governments in the last two years are the result of spending on areas that do not contribute to development outcomes in partner countries (mainly in-donor-country refugee costs, and debt relief). This 'inflated aid' accounts for 20 % of the total ODA reported by the EU-28 in 2016. At this rate, experts argue, 'once inflated, aid is discounted, the EU-28 will not be able to close the gap to 0.7 % before 2052: 20 years later than the target for 2030, and long past their initial 2015 target for a promise made almost half a century ago'.³

Objectives, methodology and structure

Against this complex backdrop, this briefing aims to provide an assessment of recent developments in the area of EU humanitarian aid and outline elements that would be pertinent to consider in policy-making

¹ [EU Official Development Assistance Reaches Highest-ever Share of Gross National Income](#), press release, European Commission, April 2016.

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Mid-term Review Report of the External Financing Instruments, [COM\(2017\) 720 final](#), European Commission, Brussels, 15 December 2017, p. 5.

³ T. Cavero et al., '[EU Aid Uncovered: How to Reach the Target on Time](#)', CONCORD Aidwatch 2017, CONCORD, Brussels.

when reflecting on how to move forward on the post-2020 architecture of the EU external financing instruments, which affect EU humanitarian aid, and the needs surrounding the new EU budget.

This European Implementation Assessment was automatically triggered by the 24 October 2017 decision of the European Parliament (EP) Conference of Committee Chairs to approve a Committee for Development (DEVE) request to draft an implementation report on the implementation of the Development Cooperation Instrument, the Humanitarian Aid Instrument and the European Development Fund. Due to time restrictions tied to the preparation of this publication, and in agreement with Enrique Guerrero Salom (S&D, Spain), the DEVE rapporteur for this implementation report, this briefing focuses on an evaluation of EU humanitarian aid. For a more comprehensive assessment of the functioning and performance of EU external action, including an evaluation of the impact of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), refer to the European Implementation Assessment prepared for the Committee for Foreign Affairs (AFET) on EU external financing instruments (EFIs) and the post-2020 architecture, to which DEVE is associated under Rule 54.⁴

Time constraints have also meant that this briefing has only considered available secondary literature. It includes evaluations of relevant EFIs conducted by/for the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors, the European Commission's latest mid-term review of the EFIs, and evaluations of the implementation of EU humanitarian aid carried out by academics and think tanks. Accordingly, this briefing first analyses the instruments the EU has at its disposal for carrying out its humanitarian work. It then evaluates the performance of the EU when carrying out humanitarian aid, and drawing on these lessons, outlines factors to be taken into account when reflecting on the future organisation and implementation of EU humanitarian aid in the context of the new EU budget.

EU humanitarian instruments

Humanitarian aid is a specific area of EU external action. It is disbursed in line with the principles of EU external action, and in compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, and the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid – impartiality, neutrality, independence and humanity.⁵ The EU seeks to pay special attention to the most severe cases of humanitarian emergency, especially those that do not receive support from other international donors. In doing so, the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) funds relief operations and coordinates Member States' policies and activities. Parliament and the Council of the EU act as co-legislators in shaping the EU's humanitarian aid policy and take part in the global debate on more effective humanitarian action.⁶ DG ECHO can finance interventions of no longer than 24 months. EU humanitarian aid is therefore designed to be speedy and flexible, and is essentially limited to short-term responses, in line with the humanitarian mandate.⁷

The scope of EU humanitarian aid, as outlined in the 1996 Council Regulation 1257/96, extends beyond the core task of lifesaving operations to also include relief for those affected by longer-lasting crises, short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction work, disaster preparedness, and addressing the consequences of

⁴ I. Ioannides, EU External Financing Instruments and the Post-2020 Architecture: European Implementation Assessment, EPRS, European Parliament, February 2018 (forthcoming).

⁵ See Article 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

⁶ A. Dobrova with A. Heinmaa, [Humanitarian Aid](#) - How the EU budget is spent, EPRS, European Parliament, November 2015.

⁷ M. Burnay et al., [Does the EU have the Right Instruments to Finance Assistance in Protracted Crises and the Needs of Upper Middle Income Countries?](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, December 2016.

population movements.⁸ Accordingly, DG ECHO has been supporting disaster risk reduction activities around the world through its 'Disaster Preparedness ECHO' (DIPECHO) programme. DIPECHO aims at increasing the resilience of communities and reducing their vulnerability through training, strengthening local early warning systems and contingency planning. This aim is also in line with the EU Global Strategy that focuses on the resilience of societies in third countries.

DG ECHO also has an unrivalled permanent network of some 465 international and local humanitarian field experts working in crisis zones around the globe. They carry out needs assessments, liaise with partners and other actors on the ground and monitor the way EU-funded aid operations are implemented. The EU is therefore present in 48 field offices in more than 40 countries.⁹ To enhance its field presence, DG ECHO also has regional offices in six capitals around the world: Amman (Jordan), Bangkok (Thailand), Dakar (Senegal), Managua (Nicaragua), Bogota (Colombia) and Nairobi (Kenya).

An instrument with a similar goal, but a different approach, is the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).¹⁰ Created in 2001, it is tasked with coordinating the action of EU Member States and partner countries (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey) following a man-made disaster or natural catastrophe. Its scope of intervention is not limited to its members but has a global reach. All territories in the region affected by the recent hurricanes, including third countries, may therefore apply for support under this mechanism. The UCPM intervenes at the request of the countries affected: it has so far responded to over 200 requests.¹¹

UCPM action is spearheaded by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), which is managed by DG ECHO and operates 24 hours a day. The ERCC monitors crises and emergencies around the world and responds accordingly. More specifically, once a request for intervention has been approved, the ERCC evaluates the needs and ensures that there is no overlap or gap in the relief operations of UCPM members. With a €368.43 million financial envelope for the current MFF, it aims at supporting and coordinating in-kind assistance, such as the sending of teams, experts and equipment to disaster-plagued countries.

European Parliament oversight

Parliament has regularly highlighted the need to increase funding for humanitarian aid and has insisted on closing the widening gap between commitments and payments. The DEVE committee, and Parliament in general, have also sought – through opinions and resolutions, including own-initiative reports – to influence the European Commission's strategic decisions and policy orientations, such as on the EU contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit, education in emergencies, and the response to the Ebola outbreak. Parliament reviews the Commission's annual work programme and ECHO's operational strategy. The adoption of the 'European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid' in 2007 responded in no small measure to firm positions adopted by Parliament. Parliament has also been an active advocate on issues of resilience, food security and for better transitions from humanitarian to development assistance.

In a mid-term evaluation, Parliament stressed the lack of implementation of the Consensus for Humanitarian Aid. It criticised 'insufficient awareness' of the Consensus, 'and call[ed] for the introduction of specific training about the Consensus, particularly for the [European External Action Service] EEAS, for

⁸ [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning Humanitarian Aid](#), OJ L 163, 2.7.1996, pp. 1-6.

⁹ [ECHO Field Network](#), European Commission, 2016.

¹⁰ M. Parry, [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#), EPRS, European Parliament, May 2015.

¹¹ C. van Lierop and E. Pichon, [EU Response to the Caribbean Hurricanes](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2017.

diplomats from the Member States and for military bodies'.¹² For this reason, the Parliament has been 'concerned to defend the independence of DG ECHO, preventing it from becoming part of the EEAS and thus avoiding any possible instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid'.¹³ More recently, in an EP resolution on the EU financial allocation for the EU Trust Fund for Africa, Parliament stressed that the fund was created 'because the EU budget and the MFF lack the resources and the flexibility needed to address the different dimensions of such crises promptly and comprehensively'. It also called for 'a more holistic solution for emergency funding in the framework of this year's revision of the 2014-2020 MFF and the revision of the external financing instruments in 2016, with a view to increasing the effectiveness and reactivity of humanitarian and development assistance available under the EU budget'.¹⁴

To this work can be added the regular exchanges in the DEVE committee with European Commission officials and the Commissioner. In response to the humanitarian situation in Myanmar, for example, which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, Parliament held an urgent debate in September 2017 to address the question with Commissioner Stylianides. Moreover, to strengthen Parliament's oversight of humanitarian aid, the DEVE committee has appointed a standing rapporteur for humanitarian aid every two and a half years since 2006. The rapporteur's mandate includes defending humanitarian aid budget interests, monitoring humanitarian aid programmes and maintaining close contacts with the humanitarian aid community.¹⁵

Assessing the impact of EU humanitarian aid

This section analyses the implementation of EU humanitarian action to assess how it has performed. While EU humanitarian aid has overall served well and is well-perceived in both the countries affected by disasters and by EU citizens,¹⁶ it has been challenged both at strategic and operational levels.

Compromising the EU's needs-based agenda

EU humanitarian aid is designed to be needs-based. As Parkes argues, it works best when it is 'insulated from the EU's immediate geographic and political interests and when [it is] allowed to respond to demand anywhere in the world – addressing emergency conditions on the ground in crisis zones in South Asia, or stepping into gaps around warzones in Africa left by international peacekeeping bodies like the United Nations. If the EU were to use such policies in pursuit of a goal as apparently self-interested as controlling the flows of migrants to Europe, it would risk politicising the presence abroad of European humanitarian workers, civilian experts, and soldiers'.¹⁷

Based on the provisions of the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the EU institutions and Member States work in a coordinated and complementary manner, and support the overall coordinating role of the United Nations. Actions envisaged range from preparedness and disaster risk reduction,

¹² [Resolution of 18 January 2011](#) on Implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: the Mid-term Review of its Action Plan and the Way Forward, European Parliament, point 1.

¹³ [Report](#) on Implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: the Mid-term Review of its Action Plan and the Way Forward, Committee on Development, European Parliament, 15 December 2010, explanatory statement, p. 14.

¹⁴ [Resolution of 13 September 2016](#) on the EU Trust Fund for Africa: the Implications for Development and Humanitarian Aid, European Parliament, point 6.

¹⁵ [Humanitarian Aid](#), Fact Sheet, European Parliament, September 2017, p. 4-5.

¹⁶ [Humanitarian Aid](#), Special Eurobarometer 453, Survey conducted between November-December 2016 by TNS opinion & social for the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, May 2017.

¹⁷ R. Parkes, '[Nobody Move! Myths of the EU Migration Crisis](#)', Chaillot Paper No 143, EU Institute for Security Studies, December 2017, p. 7.

emergency response, and assistance in protracted crises, to early recovery and linking to the work of development partners. The Consensus also sets out the modalities of the use of civil protection capabilities and military assets in emergency response.¹⁸ This also means that they aim to overcome the fragmentation of external policies related to migration, for example. More specifically, an effort is made to develop stronger links between humanitarian and development efforts through joint risk analysis and multiannual programming and financing.¹⁹

Simultaneously, however, it is important to ensure the neutrality of humanitarian assistance. While the idea of multiannual planning for humanitarian aid is gaining ground globally, there is currently no consensus to change DG ECHO's planning approach. Furthermore, whereas DG ECHO procedures are designed to be quick and flexible, several implementing partners have noted that the EU bureaucracy remains rather heavy compared to other humanitarian donors, including EU Member States.²⁰

Overlapping instruments for humanitarian causes

Experts have increasingly rung alarm bells regarding the blurring of lines between humanitarianism/development/security in practice. The EU has partnerships with third countries addressing issues related to migration and mobility. Since 2005, the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility ('GAMM') is the main framework for EU external migration and asylum policy. Several instruments have been put in place to address the external dimension of migration, and some migration-related programmes/agencies provide funding for both internal and external activities. Box 1 (below) presents the concomitant use of EU external financing instruments feeding into humanitarian aid to complement it and to ensure the smooth transition from humanitarian aid to development.

Under humanitarian aid and development cooperation, the EU budget and EU Trust Funds, as well as, outside the EU budget, the European Development Fund (EDF), address migration and asylum both geographically and thematically. In addition, EU humanitarian aid was channelled through the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) when the migration crisis touched the Western Balkans, and via the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP).²¹ In this respect, experts criticised the predecessor of the IcSP, the Instrument for Stability (IfS), for not living up to expectations: although it was designed to be a flexible instrument that could open opportunities for linking relief, rehabilitation and development, it was accused of being mainly security-driven and has failed to convince practitioners of its value in this field.²²

Box 1: Humanitarian aid for refugee management outsourced to civil society organisations in Turkey

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the EU has channelled aid to Turkey through various instruments to help the country manage migration flows: the bulk of humanitarian aid comes from DG ECHO, but other EU external funding instruments have also been put to use: the IcSP; European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR); and IPA. The EU Trust Fund (or Madad Fund) was

¹⁸ For further information, see [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission (accessed on 15 January 2018).

¹⁹ [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy](#), European External Action Service and European Commission, June 2016, p. 31.

²⁰ M. Burnay et al. [Does the EU have the Right Instruments to Finance Assistance in Protracted Crises and the Needs of Upper Middle Income Countries?](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, December 2016.

²¹ See [Evaluations of EU External Financing Instruments](#), European Commission, July 2017.

²² P. Morazán et al., [Strengthening the Link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development \(LRRD\) in the EU's Financing Instruments for Development and Humanitarian Aid under the MFF 2014-2020](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, August 2012.

created in 2014 to respond to the regional character of the refugee crisis. As of April 2016, the EU disbursed €365 million for the management of the refugee crisis in Turkey. This does not include the Refugee Facility for Turkey, a mechanism created to coordinate up to €6 billion. Development of a clear breakdown of the EU spending to help refugees located in Turkey is, however, problematic. The novelty of some of the EU instruments does not provide a clear picture of coordination and coherence in practice.²³

The EU has large contracts with international organisations to deliver humanitarian relief; some of these in turn use Turkish civil society organisations (CSOs) to help deliver the EU funds. NGOs have traditionally implemented EU humanitarian aid, and are a growing part of EU external aid. This support goes to international humanitarian NGOs to provide, among other things, education for refugees in host communities. It has also offered new funds to Turkish NGOs supporting integration and dialogue programmes for Syrians. The EU has shown some notable flexibility: in December 2015, €140 million from the IPA budget were transferred to the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis. As many CSO staff are moving into humanitarian organisations as international aid flows into this sector, some policy-makers are concerned that this weakens capacity for rights-related work. In this sector, the EU supports CSOs for a specific function, to deliver aid on the ground, and is not concerned with the development of civil society per se.

At the same time, research on the ground has found that many Turkish CSOs are concerned that external funding is pushing them to focus on refugees' basic humanitarian needs and, in return for the huge influx of emergency aid, step back from sensitive rights-based campaigning. The EU policy shift has presented CSOs with a dilemma: they recognise the need to work with the EU and the Turkish state to get help to Syrian refugees, but worry that support for their own core capacities is now being somewhat left aside – and that the EU's management of the refugee issue is unwittingly contributing to the Turkish government's aim to constrict civil society.²⁴

Working with stakeholders

Overall, the EU has worked well with its Member States and implementing partners (CSOs and other international donors) on its humanitarian response. In parallel to the aforementioned diversification of the competences and power in DG ECHO, EU Member States have maintained their prerogatives to preserve and execute their agenda but have done so without violating common agreed principles. Rather, EU Member States continue to commit to common efforts. Within the group of donors, a list of 12 major donors can be envisaged,²⁵ including the biggest countries, which have a more established tradition of cooperation with NGOs, but also smaller ones, such as Luxembourg. An analysis of the recipients of aid, divided per region, reveals that colonial legacies are no longer the most striking aspect in the relationship between donors and recipients. On the contrary, in aiding all regions of the world, EU Member States, particularly the 12 major donors, pursue the general interest of preventing systemic instability, as well as

²³ R. Ackermann et al., [Turkey: How the Pre-accession Funds have been Spent, Managed, Controlled and the Monitoring System?](#), Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, European Parliament, 23 May 2016.

²⁴ R. Youngs, Annex: EU Support to Civil Society in Turkey, Ukraine and Egypt: Mapping reforms to the external financial instruments, in I. Ioannides, EU External Financing Instruments and the Post-2020 Architecture: European Implementation Assessment, EPRS, European Parliament, February 2018 (forthcoming).

²⁵ These include (in descending order): the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, France, Finland, Spain, Luxembourg and Italy.

their own particular interests, whether political or economic. Additionally, EU Member States and DG ECHO manage to agree on the selection of third countries to support with humanitarian aid.²⁶

There is also a growing tendency to cooperate with NGOs and to delegate executive functions to them. This is one of the unintended consequences of the changes that have impacted on contemporary crises. In that context, humanitarian NGOs continue to offer their expertise, presenting themselves as useful and proficient implementing actors to DG ECHO and EU Member States (with which there is a long-established tradition of cooperation). Local NGOs are quite functional and, more importantly, are perceived as bringing legitimacy to the process, since they can obtain more responsive feedback from local communities and recipients of aid, and can make the intervention itself more acceptable and accepted. Through their direct action on the ground and capitalising on their hands-on experience, NGOs have contributed to shaping governmental agendas, including at EU level (DG ECHO and EU Member States). They have done so by interpreting their role of implementing actors, not as mere executors of planned activities, but also as exercising some level of autonomy, always in line with the humanitarian principles and DG ECHO's policy objectives. However, controversies do arise. Despite NGOs' efforts to remain neutral and to be strictly adherent to humanitarian principles, it is often hard for NGOs, as is often the case with actors deployed in such a volatile environment, to avoid the excesses of politicisation and to always ensure that all services are properly delivered to the right recipient.²⁷

European Court of Auditors' evaluation

The UCPM and the ERCC were recently examined by the European Court of Auditors, which found them to be 'good examples of value added by European cooperation'. However, a number of problem areas requiring improvement were also identified, including:

- a quicker response and possible time-saving during the early phases of disaster response;
- the use of CECIS (the Commission's communication and information platform);
- on-the-ground coordination and synergies;
- insufficient streamlining of European Commission and ECDC financial and administrative arrangements for the large-scale deployment of epidemiologists through the UCPM; and
- UCPM performance reporting.

In that light, the ECA's recommendations to the European Commission included:²⁸

- identifying ways to gain additional time during the pre-alert phase and during the selection and deployment of EUCP teams;
- developing CECIS's features, to improve the overview of assistance provided and requested, to allow for a better follow-up of priorities and to enhance user-friendliness;
- strengthening on-the-ground coordination through improving EUCP team reporting, exploiting the presence of DG ECHO field network experts and further involving EU delegations;
- assessing, together with the ECDC, potential changes needed to strengthen arrangements for the deployment of ECDC experts outside the Union through the UCPM;
- improving reporting by automatically producing statistics and indicators, thus strengthening accountability.

²⁶ D. Irrera, NGOs, ECHO, and Member States: An Empirical Analysis, in D. Irrera, *EU Emergency Response Policies and NGOs: Trends and Innovations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

²⁷ D. Irrera, NGOs, ECHO, and Member States: An Empirical Analysis, in D. Irrera, *EU Emergency Response Policies and NGOs: Trends and Innovations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

²⁸ [Union Civil Protection Mechanism: the Coordination of Responses to Disasters Outside the EU has been Broadly Effective](#), Special report No 33, European Court of Auditors, 2016.

The European Court of Auditors has not carried out any other relevant evaluation of the EU's humanitarian response for this MFF cycle.

Evaluating options for enhancing EU humanitarian aid

The mounting implications of the contemporary humanitarian crises and emergencies, the need to develop a more coherent and common aid policy and to involve civilian actors, and the necessity to fulfil the commitment to multilateral rules and procedures, are some of the key factors to consider when deciding how to reconfigure the EU's mechanisms for humanitarian action. This section outlines elements to consider when reflecting on the future of EU humanitarian aid, also in view of the new EU budget and the reconsideration of the post-2020 architecture of the EFIs.²⁹

Adjusting to new crises and new scales of crises

The European Commission's mid-term report argues that 'nexuses between security/development/humanitarian aid [have] gained political momentum'.³⁰ This implies that its framework needs to be further adjusted to today's realities, which has created – normatively speaking – a grey area, whereby humanitarian aid is extended and spills over into development activities. This situation implies that the EU needs to go beyond the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which aims at improving the coherence, effectiveness and quality of the EU's humanitarian response. This poses questions on how to safeguard the 'humanitarian needs-based approach'.

Equally, the evaluation commissioned by the European Commission on the coherence of the EU external financing instruments (EFIs) argues that 'the growing weight of stability, security and resilience issues requires more holistic approaches and less fragmented instruments'.³¹ The external dimensions of the management of migration/refugee flows figures among the challenges requiring new responses, most pertinently to humanitarian needs, to ensure and enhance the protection of migrants and refugees. Experts claim that the sheer scale of migration flows in the EU showed that security and humanitarian situations were no longer just isolated emergencies confined to a few crisis hotspots. Accordingly, the EU needed and needs to change the way it uses its instruments. 'The real issue for the EU was not whether to combine policies, but how. Could the EU inject its usual development spending in Jordan with a large dose of humanitarian aid to encourage Syrian refugees to stay there?'³²

A crisis (whatever its nature) rarely affects only one sector; it rather involves multiple areas and requires an immediate and ultimate intervention to restore order. Humanitarian aid should involve a set of tools, mechanisms, and competencies that go well beyond the traditional response. Linking policies has allowed for better international cooperation on emergency crisis and aid. For instance, cooperation in the framework of the EU-Chile Association Agreement that instituted formal mechanisms to monitor its implementation and for building relations between the two parties, has also spilled-over at multilateral

²⁹ See also I. Ioannides, *EU External Financing Instruments and the Post-2020 Architecture: European Implementation Assessment*, EPRS, European Parliament, February 2018 (forthcoming).

³⁰ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Mid-term Review Report of the External Financing Instruments, [COM\(2017\) 720 final](#), European Commission, 15 December 2017.

³¹ J. Bossuyt et al, [Coherence Report – Insights from the External Evaluation of the External Financing Instruments](#), report was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, July 2017, p. i.

³² R. Parkes, ['Nobody Move! Myths of the EU Migration Crisis'](#), Chailot Paper No 143, EU Institute for Security Studies, December 2017, p. 9.

level on, among other issues, sustainable development, global environmental challenges, humanitarian aid and crisis management.³³

Balancing the needs-based approach with EU interests

The European Commission-contracted evaluation on the coherence of the EFIs maintained that 'the EU's capacity to promote and mainstream its "values" agenda (human rights, democracy, rule of law) may be declining', but that in parallel 'accommodating pressing internal EU political priorities within instruments designed for other purposes entails risks and reduces overall coherence'.³⁴ While EU humanitarian aid is distinct from the EFIs, it may also be caught up in this vortex. This danger risks affecting EU humanitarian aid – a fundamentally non-political toolkit. Experts have argued that the spirit of the EU emergency aid policy is rapidly moving from a demarcated policy, separate from others, like development, human rights, and, more importantly, Common Security and Defence Policy, towards a more comprehensive framework. DG ECHO was initially set up to coordinate various actors and is now at the core of such change. While most researchers are positive about the work of DG ECHO and the implementation of EU humanitarian aid, others, in more limited numbers, have argued that DG ECHO acts rather more politically than technically to demonstrate efficient capacities of cooperation and innovation.³⁵

Some experts have shown that fundamental strategies of EU external action – e.g. the EU Comprehensive Approach and its Resilience Strategy – have contributed to the politicisation of humanitarian aid.³⁶ Claus Sørensen, former Director-General of DG ECHO, has admitted to problems in implementing the comprehensive approach in an exchange with Parliament in January 2014: 'Yes, we are in agreement about the Comprehensive Approach, about holding hands, about working together, but each situation is different and has to be analysed on its own merit. [...] It's not harmony; it's a battleground for how do we actually make sure that we keep this independence, while at the same time ensuring the security'.³⁷

Similarly, the EU puts a strong focus on resilience, which it defines as 'the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks'.³⁸ It implies that societies should be better prepared to cope with disasters, and that they should be assisted to recover from the consequences of disasters more easily. The concept challenges the very foundations of emergency relief because it points to the need to integrate humanitarian and development aid and to target the underlying causes of crisis more effectively. In that light, Dany argues that significant tensions and conflict exist among different stakeholders about the way the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence should be understood, and how they should be applied in practice. This normative contestation, embedded at EU strategy level, has triggered the politicisation of humanitarian aid and has made it difficult for humanitarian actors to focus strictly on peoples' needs in devastating crises.³⁹

³³ I. Ioannides, [The Effects of Human Rights Related Clauses in the EU-Mexico Global Agreement and the EU-Chile Association Agreement: Ex-Post Impact Assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2017, p. 156.

³⁴ J. Bossuyt et al, [Coherence Report – Insights from the External Evaluation of the External Financing Instruments](#), report commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, July 2017, p. i.

³⁵ Conclusions: The EU Humanitarian Aid Policy in the Age of Change, in D. Irrera, *EU Emergency Response Policies and NGOs: Trends and Innovations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 67.

³⁶ C. Dany, 'Politicization of Humanitarian Aid in the European Union', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2015, p. 419-438.

³⁷ C. Sørensen, Director General, DG ECHO, transcript of parliamentary hearing, 20 January 2014.

³⁸ The EU Approach to Resilience, Learning from Food Security Crises, [COM\(2012\) 586 final](#), European Commission,, 13 October 2012, p. 5.

³⁹ C. Dany, 'Politicization of Humanitarian Aid in the European Union', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2015, pp. 419-438.

The diversification of the role of DG ECHO seems to have led to the relocation of funds to a new set of humanitarian objectives. The diversification of competences and power of DG ECHO has impacted its actions, including on sensitive dossiers such as assistance to refugees and internally displaced people in conflict zones like Syria. DG ECHO does not act on the ground, but rather provides mandates and resources to its partner organisations. The same mechanisms have been integrated by additional funding instruments, like the Refugee Facility for Turkey, in order to support humanitarian projects for refugees hosted in camps in Turkey, along the Syrian border. (See Box 1).

In parallel, it is clear that EU Member States have maintained their prerogatives to preserve and execute their agenda, without violating common principles, and rather continuing to commit to common efforts. In reality, however, the expansion of the EU humanitarian agenda, the multiplication of its goals, the inclusion of more sensitive issues beyond the traditional cooperation with third countries, and the management of transboundary and complex crises could have serious political implications that could, in the long-run, also affect EU legitimacy and accountability.⁴⁰

Adjusting EU funding to complex humanitarian crises

Existing EU funding programmes and instruments have been challenged when attempting to adjust to the needs and challenges of increasing changes at international and geopolitical level, including when aiming to prevent and react to a growing number of devastating humanitarian crises.⁴¹ At the level of the design of the country or regional programmes, numerous coordination mechanisms among European Commission services and the EEAS aim at ensuring complementarity. Such cooperation was mobilised, for example, when the European Commission elaborated a joint humanitarian and development framework for Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, supported by different instruments, including the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), emergency assistance, and the IcSP.

Since 2011, there have been numerous examples when external financing instruments have intervened at different stages of a crisis situation. Cases in point also include, for example, Libya, Tunisia and Ukraine, where the humanitarian instrument intervened first, followed by the IcSP, and then the ENI intervention. The same complementarity applies in the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, where the humanitarian instrument focuses on life saving actions, while the ENI is more geared towards longer term development issues (such as providing support for schooling of children in hosting communities in Jordan and Lebanon).⁴²

Equally, in the context of the migration crisis, IPA has proven to be flexible in humanitarian instances and allowed a rapid reallocation to flooding/refugee issues in the Western Balkans, in particular Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey.⁴³ Indeed, humanitarian assistance became one of the six priority areas for IPA under the 2014-2020 MFF. The IcSP acted as a flexible tool to complement humanitarian aid, but was constrained by the lack of effective synergies with other EFIs, due to lack of flexibility and the lengthy procedures of most other EFIs.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ D. Irrera, *EU Emergency Response Policies and NGOs: Trends and Innovations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 72.

⁴¹ See [Evaluations of EU External Financing Instruments](#), European Commission, July 2017 (accessed on 20 January 2018).

⁴² Evaluation of the European Neighbourhood Instrument Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Mid-term review report of the External Financing Instruments, [SWD\(2017\) 602 final](#), European Commission, Staff Working Document, 15 December 2017, p. 28.

⁴³ J. Bossuyt et al, [Coherence Report – Insights from the External Evaluation of the External Financing Instruments](#), report commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, July 2017, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Commission Staff Working Document, Midterm evaluation of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Midterm Review Report on the External Financing Instruments, [SWD\(2017\) 607 final](#), European Commission, 15 December 2017, pp. 4, 9, 18.

In discussions about the comprehensive approach, Member States therefore sought to enhance synergies between military, state and humanitarian actors by demanding that civil-protection actors be allowed to use ECHO field offices, and that their efforts be merged organisationally in a 'one-shop stop'. Nevertheless, most NGOs have objected to this closer institutional cooperation between humanitarian and civil-protection actors. Instead, institutional independence and sufficient financial means are seen as decisive for avoiding 'mission creep' – the watering-down of the distinction between humanitarian and security issues.⁴⁵

Beyond safeguarding the ethical prerogatives of EU humanitarian aid, more is needed at the level of preparation and flexibility. Over the years, humanitarian action has become more effective. However, humanitarian actors still struggle with finding ways to better prevent and prepare for disasters, and to respond in a manner that is more flexible and better adapted to new realities and the needs of afflicted populations, while at the same time alleviating suffering, maintaining dignity and saving lives – the ultimate objective of humanitarian work.⁴⁶

Adjusting the EU budget to funding needs

According to the Red Cross, 'humanitarian crises are happening ever more frequently and growing in scale'. Asked about the current pressure on Europe's public finances, 84 % of responders to a 2017 Eurobarometer survey supported continued funding for EU humanitarian aid; 66 % felt that humanitarian aid was more efficient when disbursed by the EU rather than by individual countries.⁴⁷ While medicine, shelter, food, sanitation, and water are the traditional areas of a humanitarian delivery system, the transformation of humanitarian crises in today's world, both in terms of scale and configuration, pointed to the need to focus on education, which 'is an enormous, powerful need arising out of the present displacement',⁴⁸ and is also recognised in the EU Global Strategy.⁴⁹ This is how emergency relief has become increasingly linked to development, as explained above. The Eurobarometer shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents (91 %) believe that the EU should fund education for children and young people caught up in crises.⁵⁰ Experts argue that, despite some progress made in recent years in bridging the funding gap in the grey area between relief and development, this gap remains and the coordination and enhancement of linking relief, rehabilitation and development activities is has not been institutionalised.⁵¹

Moreover, although external financing under Heading IV (global Europe) of the MFF may be proportionally larger than today, according to the budgetary implications of President Juncker's scenarios for the future of Europe, overall budget cuts might result from the UK decision to withdraw from the EU.⁵² With a total ODA volume of US\$18.7 billion in 2015, the UK is the aid world's second largest contributor in absolute terms. A recent study attempts to quantify the financial, political and operational impact of Brexit on EU aid:⁵³ the

⁴⁵ C. Dany, 'Politicization of Humanitarian Aid in the European Union', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2015, p. 433.

⁴⁶ J. Barna, [Humanitarian Aid: Crises, Trends, Challenges](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, August 2014.

⁴⁷ [Humanitarian Aid](#), Special Eurobarometer 453, Survey conducted between November-December 2016 by TNS opinion & social for the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, May 2017.

⁴⁸ P. Maurer, [Humanitarian Crises Are on the Rise. By 2030, This Is How We'll Respond](#), Annual Meeting of the Global Future Councils, World Economic Forum, 13 November 2016.

⁴⁹ [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy](#), European External Action Service and European Commission, June 2016, p. 27.

⁵⁰ [Humanitarian Aid](#), Special Eurobarometer 453, Survey conducted between November-December 2016 by TNS opinion & social for the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, May 2017.

⁵¹ P. Morazán et al., [Strengthening the Link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development \(LRRD\) in the EU's Financing Instruments for Development and Humanitarian Aid under the MFF 2014-2020](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, August 2012.

⁵² See Annex I, in European Commission, [Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances](#), 2017, p. 38.

⁵³ I. Olivé and A. Pérez, [Possible Impacts of Brexit on EU Development and Humanitarian Policies](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, April 2017, p. 25-31.

EU could lose between 10 % and 13 % of its world aid share. Its presence, through ODA, in neighbouring countries throughout eastern Europe and North Africa could be particularly affected, with a cut of between 1 % and 4 %, depending on different scenarios. The UK also provided the EU with a high capacity to sustain NGOs as implementing actors. Such a contribution will surely continue outside the EU, but experts argue that UK withdrawal from the EU will nevertheless decrease the level of investment in DG ECHO and will influence relations with NGOs.⁵⁴

The EU could react to UK withdrawal by adopting two distinct approaches to foreign policy and development cooperation. It could limit its role to that of a regional power, retrenching to the nearest borders, or alternatively, it could grow to become a global leader. In the first approach, Brexit would have a very mild effect and would lead to few policy challenges. However, in the second, the EU would need to compensate for the loss of the UK's contribution to EU aid, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. For example, a reallocation strategy would be needed if the EU aims at compensating for the loss of participation from NGOs and selected multilateral actors in the new scenario. Experts argue that it would be in the best interests of the EU to coordinate closely with the UK on development issues, and lever the highest amount of UK funding possible to support EU instruments. In that case, the EU institutions would need clear rules on how to channel UK funding and how to work together with UK government officers.⁵⁵

For its part, and in response to new complex humanitarian crises, the EU has adopted, following the European Commission's proposal to expand special instruments and to establish a crisis reserve to improve the ability to respond to crises and events with major humanitarian or security implications,⁵⁶ Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2017/1123. It gives the Union the possibility 'to react to unforeseen circumstances with particular focus on the new challenges [through] the Emergency Aid Reserve and the Flexibility Instrument'.⁵⁷ The compromise text strengthened a number of flexibility provisions, while partly modifying the Commission proposal. The annual amounts (in 2011 prices) available for the Flexibility Instrument and the Emergency Aid Reserve would be increased respectively to €600 million (from €471 million) and €300 million (from €280 million).⁵⁸ The mobilisation of funds is one, among other issues, that will be considered following the European Commission's mid-term evaluation of its external financing instruments in the discussions on the post-2020 architecture of the EU instruments.

To contact the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit, please e-mail: EPRS-ExPostEvaluation@ep.europa.eu

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⁵⁴ Conclusions: The EU Humanitarian Aid Policy in the Age of Change, in D. Irrera, *EU Emergency Response Policies and NGOs: Trends and Innovations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 67.

⁵⁵ [Possible Impacts of Brexit on EU Development and Humanitarian Policies](#), Policy Department for External Policies, European Parliament, April 2017, p. 32-37.

⁵⁶ Communication from the Commission, Mid-term Review/Revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, An EU Budget Focused on Results, [COM\(2016\) 603 final](#), European Commission, 14 September 2016.

⁵⁷ [Council Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2017/1123 of 20 June 2017 amending Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) No 1311/2013 Laying Down the Multiannual Financial Framework for the Years 2014-2020](#), OJ L163, 24 June 2017, p. 1-3.

⁵⁸ A. D'Alfonso, [2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\): Mid-term Revision](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 6 July 2017.